

Review: The Business of Global Environmental Governance

By David L. Levy and Peter J. Newell (Eds.)

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David L. Levy and Peter J. Newell (Eds.) *The Business of Global Environmental Governance*. Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press. 2005. 360 pp. ISBN 0-262-62188-6 Pbk.) \$US27.00.

Traditional approaches to both international relations as a discipline and environmental governance and management have all too often been simplistic. Levy and Newell have set out to develop a more powerful conceptual basis for finding insight into and understanding of the new dynamics that have evolved as major companies play an increasing role in environmental policy and practices. They are concerned to encompass " . . . *the rich and complex process of bargaining and negotiation among a range of actors, most importantly firms, industry associations, NGOs, state agencies and international organisations (which can also serve as a forum for these negotiations).*" (page 5)

They propose a paradigm for understanding based in Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony. In brief, Gramsci saw human decision making and behavior as often being based in a series of inter-related and consensual hegemonic beliefs that arise from both political and civil society. His framework certainly provides an intellectual environment within which beliefs can be negotiated or determined by interaction within any level of society from the global to the individual; at the same time, it provides for understanding the vertical influence from each level to the others. Although Gramsci was never able to complete his very complex project, he has inspired many others to take his ideas and apply them in a range of areas. The coherence and value of the resulting neo-Gramscian theories have continued to increase and are now a central tool in many theoretical contexts. So, it is no surprise that Levy and Newell have built upon this foundation.

Other contributors to the volume have applied their paradigm in a diversity of arenas where business now plays a central role in negotiating environmental governance. Some tackle such issues as climate change, protection of the ozone layer, genetic engineering, water supply and control of toxins, while others examine the processes of lobbying, construction of alliances, the ISO as a regulatory mechanism, insurance and security.

From my own experience, I regret some of the omissions, particularly issues

about land tenure and control, the marine environment, the mining and quarrying industries and the international aid industry. Doubtless, others would identify different omissions. At the same time, their paradigm is a robust one and is well demonstrated. I believe that I could very easily use this volume as a key reference from which to enhance my own analysis of the omissions. In brief, the authors have done their job very well and we are delighted with its value in helping to sort out our own intellectual struggles. It is an excellent book. But, it is a complex and challenging one. Even though most of the authors are models of clarity, they are dealing with very difficult and tortuous ideas and so we would recommend it primarily as a resource for experienced policy scientists or for doctoral level students. Many of those who have long practical on-ground experience will doubtless also find it useful in the same way. But in spite of the continuing warnings from the authors, less experienced readers may well be led by its very clarity into seeing it as a good simple recipe book.

Environmental governance is, and probably always will be, a mire of ambiguity and contradiction. The commercial world recognizes this and further compounds the problem by resorting to simplification and slogans. As just one simple example, discussed in the book, the International Standards Organisation (ISO) claims to provide the basis of good practice by setting down a series of criteria and processes to enable the ready (but extremely costly) assessment of compliance. However, they are committed to a one-size-fits-all program that only examines management and excludes proper consideration of the ethical issues that are inevitably encapsulated in the objectives of the organization, the rights of individuals and the outcomes. In the words of one of the authors, the ISO 14000 “. . . is based on environmental management and not on environmental performance.” (p. 238)

One of the common keywords of the book is “greenwash”: the use of modern managerialism and communication technology to disguise or hide failures to perform. Yet this book is not a stereotypical attack on the private sector, nor is it an advertisement for them. It demonstrates benefits that have accrued from the growing involvement of industry in environmental management while at the same time sounding appropriate warnings. The authors also deal quite separately with each issue, emphasizing just how much overall generalizations are not at all helpful. Perhaps the book’s greatest strength is that all authors clearly reject the commonly heard notion that scientists should provide answers for use by politicians and other “consumers.” But they have been extremely competent in providing ideas and other tools that may help those who want answers to find them for themselves.

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